Trump’s Recognition of Jerusalem:
Enough with Dread and Circuses

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Israeli-Palestinian “peace process” is strictly a two-party affair. It cannot and will not succeed if the OIC-57 and the G-77 continue to collude towards pitting the UN perpetually against Israel. Reminding the world in no uncertain terms of the fact that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital invites doubters and deniers to come to their senses at last and start negotiating in realistic terms – if “a just and durable peace for all” is, in fact, what the Islamic countries and their allies are after.

US President Donald Trump’s formal recognition of the State of Israel’s capital city was carefully crafted, using language that unambiguously left all decisional latitudes intact for the two parties to negotiate directly. Compared to the outrageously biased, frankly ridiculous UNESCO document proclaiming Jerusalem to be “a Muslim City,” Trump’s historically accurate and factual observation, devoid of preemptive prejudice, was refreshing.

Some have suggested that Trump might have acted to please his Christian evangelical base; others, that the declaration was an example of the president’s predisposition for spectacular public self-promotion; still others, that he was rewarding his loyal Jewish entourage (family, friends, envoys, and representatives). Many professed concern over Trump’s apparent lack of regard for the advice offered by more seasoned heads of state, diplomats, allies, friends, and others. The Qatari TV station Al Jazeera’s Palestinian political commentator went so far as to implicate the Saudis and the UAE in alleged behind-the-scenes collusion with the US in the drafting of the declaration.

Yet the wording of Trump’s statement merits more credit than what the pundits condescend to grant him. His affirmation highlights the only realistic
baseline for any negotiation capable of producing a “just and lasting peace” in the best interests of both stakeholders.

The British representative at the UN challenged the US to come up with yet another “road map.” If Washington is to be an honest broker, it cannot and should not do any such thing. An externally directed set of guidelines is doomed to be unacceptable to at least one of the parties, and would in any case lead nowhere as it would not be a product of direct negotiation.

Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem’s status displeased the Muslim Brotherhood, its offshoot Hamas, and the Qatari media organ Al Jazeera, all of which seek to discredit and delegitimize Israel at every opportunity. Nor was it in France’s interest to agree with the US on the day the French president was on his way to Doha to sign contracts worth 12 billion euros. Acknowledging the factual truth that Jerusalem was, is, and remains Israel’s capital city, come what may, is inconvenient to many for material, not moral, reasons. Yet the Jewish state of Israel without Jerusalem as its capital is unthinkable, just as any peace agreement not ratified by Israel in its capital is unimaginable.

Jordan’s rejection as “null and void” of the reality of Jerusalem’s status as Israel’s capital, on the grounds that it is “in violation of international law,” would be risible if it were not infuriating for being so blatantly disingenuous. It disregards several undeniable facts. First, the “West Bank” was annexed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan with no “concern for international law” to begin with and was recognized by no state apart from Britain and Pakistan. Second, this self-proclaimed “guardian of the Muslim and Christian Houses of Faith” thought nothing of barring Jews from entering Jerusalem to worship at their own holiest sites. This state of affairs prevailed until 1967, when the kingdom, which had renamed itself Jordan, legally lost both the West Bank and Jerusalem after joining a war of aggression intended to annihilate the State of Israel. Jordan was unconditionally defeated. It abandoned any and all “rights” to the territories lost, even dispossessing the politically voiceless natives of their Jordanian passports, leading them to imagine a nationalism they had never before claimed. And third, notwithstanding its total victory, Israel granted Jordan – through the Waqf – “the privilege” (not the right) to continue overseeing the Muslim (not the Christian) holy places in Israel’s unified capital city.

The reactions from Hezbollah and Hamas were from the same libretto, calling for the intifada posited as “hypothetically” likely by Iran’s Supreme Leader.

The irony is that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a religiously grounded global entity, did not itself convey a letter to the UN. Its 57 members, acting as sovereign nations and discrete members of the UN, signed a letter of
condemnation denouncing the Trump initiative and positing that it could occasion a “religious war” to be conducted “by fundamentalist terror groups” – a veiled threat reiterated by Mahmoud Abbas.

It would have been naïve to expect approval of, let alone support for, the morally courageous US initiative from the rest of the usual suspects. Many nations joined the chorus of condemnation – some to get even with the US; some to please Arab clients; some acting in favor of Arabs and Palestinians; some acting against Jews and Israelis. Emboldened by this chorus, Abbas went so far in his effrontery as to disinvite US Vice President Pence from a planned visit to Bethlehem. Palestinians dutifully showed up for what they were told would be a showdown (“three days of rage”). The Arab League met to engage in the usual condemnations and self-righteous inflammatory rhetoric on behalf of the “victims.” Al Jazeera tried to mediatize “scenes of violence” here and there by people who seemed to be staging the events more out of a sense of duty than deep personal motivation. It was left to the Arab League and the OIC to take the lead, televise debates, and prepare loaded text for yet another UN resolution; though according to the agenda the US president is to be formally asked to rescind his position.

It would seem high time for all the peripheral actors to put an end to the theatrics and to encourage their reluctant champion to come to the negotiating table for direct, credible, and conclusive talks.

Anything else would be just more dread and circuses. Credit to President Trump for acknowledging the obvious: Israel is not going to surrender Jerusalem.

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